

identified as stepping up, either supporting a gas tax or at least being open to it. We have seen leadership at the State level as eight States in the last 2 years have increased gas taxes, including some very red States like Wyoming and New Hampshire. Here in the House, there are already 136 Members who have signed a bipartisan letter urging the leadership to act on providing appropriate funding that is sustainable and dedicated.

Well, Mr. Speaker, we do have a solution. This issue has been studied extensively, including two Presidential commissions during the Bush administration. The conclusion was that there is no better, more effective solution than simply raising the gas tax, which hasn't been increased in 22 years.

People know America is falling behind as it is falling apart. The concern about the financial impact of a gas tax increase on families is waning. As gas prices plummet, my corner gas station is selling gasoline at \$1.60 per gallon less than its peak last year.

I will be reintroducing the funding proposal I had in the last Congress. That legislation was widely supported by a range of interests that included labor, business, the professions, local government, transit, environmentalists, truckers, AAA, and cyclists. They all agreed that there is a critical need to fund investments in rebuilding and renewing America.

Mr. Speaker, the arguments today are basically the same that were used by President Ronald Reagan in his Thanksgiving Day address in 1982. He used his nationwide radio speech 33 years ago to call for an increase that more than doubled the Federal gas tax. He pointed out that that tax is actually for the people who benefit from using it, that the user fee would cost less than the damage to repair their cars from damage due to poor conditions from roads and bridges. As President Reagan said, it would probably be less than a pair of shock absorbers.

He pointed out that the gas tax then, as now, had not been raised in more than two decades, and that repairing infrastructure that was failing would put hundreds of thousands of people to work while it protected the investment in our infrastructure as well as in our automobiles.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for Congress to step up. The States are doing their part. People are exploring innovative financing approaches involving the private sector. People are looking at creative ways to design and build projects, but there is no substitute for the 25 percent of infrastructure funding that comes from the Federal partnership. It is absolutely essential for projects that are multiyear, projects that are multimodal and that involve a number of jurisdictions, often a number of States.

This May we face the expiration of the short-term highway trust fund fix from last summer. We are back in the exact same situation we were then.

Failing to address the funding issue head-on has meant that we haven't had a 6-year reauthorization approved by Congress since 1997. Since then, we have had two ever-shorter reauthorizations and 21 temporary extensions. Over \$60 billion of general fund money has been needed to just prop up our inadequate system.

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Mr. Speaker, no country has become great planning and building its infrastructure 6 months at a time. It is time to capitalize on falling oil prices, on the momentum that is building around the country, and the realization that we need to act now.

I strongly urge my colleagues to join me and, indeed, President Reagan in this long overdue action. America will be better off, the economy will be stronger, communities will be more livable and our families safer, healthier, and more economically secure.

#### STRENGTH OF THE PUERTO RICO STATEHOOD MOVEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Puerto Rico (Mr. PIERLUISI) for 5 minutes.

Mr. PIERLUISI. Mr. Speaker, last week I spoke about Puerto Rico's mission to discard its status as a U.S. territory and to become a U.S. State. Today, I rise to inform my colleagues about the most recent phase of this mission.

A brief word of background. Puerto Rico has been a territory since 1898. Its status is incompatible with the principles this Nation strives to uphold at home and promotes abroad. There are 3.6 million American citizens in Puerto Rico. My constituents cherish their U.S. citizenship and have made countless contributions to this country in law, science, business, government, the arts, the armed services, and every other field of human endeavor. Yet they cannot vote for President, have no U.S. Senators, and send one Delegate to the House who has a voice but no vote in this Chamber.

The people of Puerto Rico, beyond lacking democratic rights, are deprived of equality under law. Congress has a license to discriminate against the territories, and Puerto Rico is treated worse than the States under a range of Federal programs. To compensate for the shortfall in Federal funding, the Puerto Rican government has borrowed heavily in order to provide adequate public services. This disparate treatment is the principal reason why Puerto Rico has endured severe economic problems for decades.

Inequality, both political and economic, is driving thousands of my constituents to depart for the States every month. It is human nature to go where you believe you can secure a better future for yourself and your family. However, residents of Puerto Rico have fi-

nally said enough is enough. They demand a status that is democratic and dignified, a proud status for a proud people.

In a referendum organized by the local government in 2012, voters in Puerto Rico rejected territory status and expressed a clear preference for statehood. In response, Congress provided an appropriation of \$2.5 million to fund the first federally sponsored vote in Puerto Rico's history, with the clear goal of resolving the territory's status. This is the most significant step the Federal Government has ever taken to settle the status debate in Puerto Rico.

I have proposed that the funding be used to hold a federally sponsored "yes" or "no" vote on whether Puerto Rico should be admitted as a State. Some have complained that Puerto Rico has already voted for statehood and should not have to vote again. This argument is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of history and how Washington works. After expressing a strong desire for statehood in local referenda, the territories of Alaska and Hawaii each held federally sponsored "yes" or "no" votes on admission that led to statehood. If Puerto Rico wants to become a State, it must do the same.

My proposal has broad congressional support, since a bill I filed last Congress that endorsed this approach obtained 131 cosponsors and led to the filing of an identical Senate bill. My proposal also has significant local support. Yesterday, in a remarkable display of unity and resolve, all 22 members of the statehood delegation in the Puerto Rico house and all eight members of the statehood delegation in the Puerto Rico Senate introduced identical bills that proposed to use the appropriation from Congress to conduct a federally sponsored vote on Puerto Rico's admission as a State. Now all that remains is for Puerto Rico's Governor, speaker of the house, and senate president—each a defender of the failed status quo—to show some courage and schedule this vote. Real leaders do not fear the democratic process or its results.

Meanwhile, statehood forces continue our forward march, expanding in size and strength. Indeed, today statehood supporters are rallying outside the White House and are holding meetings here in Congress. In the coming weeks and months, our advocacy efforts will only intensify. As individuals, our ability to effect change is inherently limited, but as a united movement, we are as strong as steel. We are fighting for equality, and we will not stop until we achieve it.

#### OPPOSING THE REPUBLICAN AGENDA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Minnesota (Mr. ELLISON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. ELLISON. Mr. Speaker, this Congress is still very young. This Congress